DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 201 051 EA 013 502

TITLE	The Flight from the Public Schools. Highlights of a Special Seminar for Legislators (Atlanta, Georgia, July 31, 1980).
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colo.: National Conference of State Legislatures, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, New York, N.Y.; Ford Foundation, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE	31 Jul 80
NOTE	15p.; Advanced Leadership Program Services. Funded in part by the Frost Foundation.
AVAILABLE FROM	Education Commission of the States, 300 Lincoln Tower, 1860 Lincoln St., Denver, CO 80295 (free: limited supply).
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Declining Enrollment; Discipline; Educational Change; Ethnic Groups; Legislators; Moral Values; Parent Attitudes; *Private Schools; *Public Opinion; *Public Schools; School Support; Seminars; Urban Education

ABSTRACT

Presentations on the flight from public schools given at a seminar for legislators are briefly highlighted in this paper. Seventeen topics are covered including enrollment expectations, Christian schools, urban education, ethnic clustering, and confidence in public education. (WD)

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ED201051

Highlights

of a Special Seminar for Legislators

The Flight From the Public Schools

Hyatt Regency Hotel • July 31, 1980 • Atlanta, Georgia

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In Cooperation With the New England Board of Higher Education,
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Education Commission of the States

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(ADVANCED LEADERSHIP PROGRAM SERVICES)

The ALPS Program was established in March 1979 to enhance the development of a cadre of existing and potential legislative leaders who know education in their respective states, at regional and national levels. This cadre is being developed through regional and national seminars which emphasize the most vital education issues facing legislators. Invitees are chosen from nominations received from majority and minority leadership of both houses of the legislature, chief state school officers and state higher education executive officers from the respective states.

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FEB 16 1981

FOREWORD

The alleged flight from the public schools (as well as the interpretations put on the flight -- if there be a flight) is one of the most stirring topics in education across the land.

Preceding the Annual Meeting of the Education Commission of the States (ECS), in Atlanta, Georgia, July 31-August 2, 1980, ALPS sponsored a special seminar July 31 for legislators to which all ECS Commissioners were invited. The stimulating and provocative seminar was structured to simulate a public hearing before the education committee of the State of "Utopia." Seminar Chairman, Bennett Katz, Maine State Senator and Senate Majority Leader, allowed his distinguished colleagues on the committee (Representative Jim Chrest, Oregon; Representative Robert Davis, Tennessee; Senator Anne Lindeman, Arizona; and Assemblyman Leonard Stavisky, New York) to question "witnesses" about important and sensitive issues relating to public and nonpublic education. The witnesses offering testimony were distinguished and knowledgeable: Dr. William Hazard of Northwestern University; Dr. Anne Campbell, Nebraska Commissioner of Education; and Robert Baldwin, Executive Director of the Citizens for Educational Freedom, Washington, D.C.

The following Reportorial Memorandum by Bice Clemow, a veteran newspaper and television personality, reports cogently the informative and provocative session.

Out of the program and the questions emerged divergent views concerning the present state of public and nonpublic schools. Dynamic issues that were examined included the controversy of public apathy and despair / returning public confidence in education, and philosophical differences between fundamentalist educators and public school educators. Also discussed were the increase in Christian schools, issues of assurance of quality, the demands placed on public schools, choices provided by public schools, the primacy of urban education as the dominant domestic problem. Other comments concerned local school boards' control, parental prerogative in determining the nature of education for one's children and the double standard of discipline in public and private schools.

Despite the at times controversial points-of-view that were presented during the hearing taking place in the mythical state of an ideal educational environment, the exchange of ideas created an exciting forum for everyone participating in and attending the seminar. The spirit of the seminar, reflecting the basic desire of all concerned to achieve the best possible public or nonpublic education, was expressed by one of the presenters who commended to legislators an open mind to all means of serving the unserved educational needs.

NCSL and ECS, cosponsors of the seminar, in cooperation with NEBHE, SREB and WICHE, are grateful to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation and the Frost Foundation for their support of the ALPS activities.

Any comments or questions about the attached are more than welcome.

Louis Rabineau
Director
Advanced Leadership Program Services

SEMINAR PROGRAM

Presenters:

Robert Baldwin, Executive Director, Citizens for Educational Freedom, Washington, D.C.
Anne Campbell, Commissioner of Education, Nebraska
William Hazard, Professor of Education, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois; paper presented, "The Flight from the Public Schools--Myth or Reality?"*

(Mock) Legislative Committee:

Chairman:
The Honorable Bennett Katz, State Senator and Senate Majority Leader, Maine

Members:
The Honorable James Chrest, State Representative, Oregon
The Honorable Robert Davis, State Representative, Tennessee
The Honorable Anne Lindeman, State Senator, Arizona
The Honorable Leonard Stavisky, State Assemblyman, New York

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*Copies are available from: Dr. Louis Rabineau, Director, Advanced Leadership Program Services (ALPS), Education Commission of the States, 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colorado 80295.

A REPORTORIAL MEMORANDUM (V)

BY BICE CLEMOW

ON A SPECIAL SEMINAR FOR LEGISLATORS, THE FLIGHT FROM THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS,

SPONSORED BY THE ADVANCED LEADERSHIP PROGRAM SERVICES (ALPS)

Atlanta, Georgia, July 31, 1980

Apathy and Despair v. Returning Confidence in Public Education

State Senator Bennett Katz said it all made him a little bit nervous and the sagacious majority leader in the Maine senate was not the only one. Northwestern University professor of education, William Hazard, had just laid it on the line to a crowded roomful of state lawmakers and educational leaders at an ALPS seminar preceding the annual meeting of the Education Commission of the States in Atlanta, Georgia. Present and future enrollment figures at both public and, especially, nonpublic schools are necessarily "squishy," Hazard admitted, but they are solid enough for him to argue that "if this growing apathy and despair about public schooling grows and matures we obviously should expect further expansion in non-public schooling."

A hint of rebuttal to his implied premise came the same day in New York and was referred to by several speakers. The Times, reporting on a Gallup poll, said tnat "confidence in the nation's public schools, which was badly shaken in the 1970's, may no longer be slipping. For the first time in at least seven years the proportion of adults who think the public schools are doing a better than average job has increased..." According to the nationwide survey, 35 percent of adults gave the public schools an "A" or "B", 47 percent a "C" and 18 percent a "D" or "F". "The poll indicated that in comparison with other institutions . . . most adults still hold the public schools in relatively high regard. Only the church ranked higher."

Enrollment Expectations for Public and Nonpublic Schools

Professor Hazard's remarks did not relieve the troubling ambiguity of the title of his paper: "The Flight from the Public Schools--Myth or Reality?" Indeed he did not forecast for the 80's any significant change in the nine-to-one ratio between public and nonpublic enrollment, though he spoke of impressive shifts within the religiously-rooted schools--down for the Catholic elementary schools and up for the fundamentalist Protestant institutions. Other speakers saw in that trend the promise of pressure from a new quarter for funding of nonpublic schools on the one hand and the avoidance of state control over nonpublic schooling on the other.

There is, of course, a worldwide and continued lowering of fertility. Currently in some U. S. states live births are below the population replacement rate. By 1980 the post-World War II bulge of babies had moved through the schools. As school-age populations shrink, the effects vary radically among states and within states, but,

overall. Professor Hazard's public school data indicate a national 9 percent enrollment drop between 1974 and 1980. The decline was 11 percent in grades K-8 and 6.5 percent in grades 9-12. By 1990 public school elementary totals are predicted to be back to the 1974 level of 33 million, but the high school slide will continue from the present 14,329,000 to 11,876,000 in 1990.

The professor's nonpublic school enrollment figures, unfortunately for making comparisons, end with 1976-77. They indicate a 17 percent drop in nonpublic enrollment during the period of 1966 to 1977. Catholic school enrollments were down 37 percent while the fundamentalist church school enrollment went up four times to 419,000. Other sources indicate that Catholic school enrollments have tended to stabilize since 1977, and most established secular private schools, particularly at the secondary level, have not had and do not expect significant enrollment expansion. Their increased applications have allowed a raising of academic admissions standards. Professor Hazard cautioned against focusing unduly on race in public shifts, but noted that enrollment in segregationist academies obviously accounts in some part for an 11-year increase (1966-77) in nonchurch-related private school enrollment of 126 percent--from 341,000 to 772,000.

Increase in Christian Schools

In response to Professor Hazard's figures, Robert Baldwin, executive director of the fundamentalist Citizens for Educational Freedom, Washington, D.C., claimed that Christian schools have been starting at the rate of three per day for the last three years and now total 8,000. At the present average of 175 pupils the Christian schools would, by Baldwin's estimates, this fall be pushing 1,500,000 enrollment, a statistic that would reduce the public-nonpublic ratio to 8-to-1. Baldwin confidently claimed that if the present rate of parents "fleeing the public schools" persisted to 1990 the Christian schools will outnumber the public schools.

Issue of Control of Education

Whatever the exact current figures, Professor Hazard says the trend will certainly stimulate "conflict and hassle" over who controls and who should control education. The issue of educating pupils at home and at church-run academies began arriving at the state courts during the 1970s. All states compel school attendance, but leave options to parents for using nonpublic schools or home instruction under a variety of requirements for equivalency of programs and selection of teachers. Professor Hazard noted that loss of public school pupils to nonpublic schools has "triggered sharp conflicts." From his study of mostly lower court decisions, the professor concluded that the use of such state statutory terms as "equivalent," "substantially equivalent," "competent," and "sufficient" provide "an ample frame of ambiguity on which to hang a myriad of challenges by parents and state authorities."

Difficulty of State Challenge

Hazard's impressions, summed up, are that states will have a tough time showing a compelling social interest in the education of children in public schools. Without

such a showing it will be constitutionally improbable to challenge successfully parents' rights to home or alternative nonpublic school education for their children. Hazard cited the Ohio Supreme Court decision in which the basic theory seemed to be "if parents truly believed in their religious concerns they had every right to send their children to these Christian tabernacles whether or not they had state approval." Typically the fundamentalist academy resists state supervision over curriculum, discipline or teacher selection.

Interest of Fundamentalist Schools in Public Funds

But Baldwin, who was bitterly critical of states that bring charges of criminal child neglect against parents who seek alternative schooling, made it clear the fundamentalist schools would like public money. "In the next five or ten years," he told the legislators, "if the public establishment continues its onslaught on nonpublic education by controls (and) by choking off nonpublic education by lack of funding, there will be a dramatic decline in the number of nonpublic schools."

"Aren't you skirting around the voucher?" asked Arizona lawmaker Anne Lindeman. "Parents I talk to are not simply concerned about religious content but that their children learn right from wrong with some discipline--education in what they see as the basics rather than the diluted program they see in the public schools." Baldwin obliquely spoke for vouchers, saying parents "would like to have the choice to live where you want and educate your children at the school you want in and around your general area."

Baldwin also seconded much of what Professor Hazard had to say. Although Baldwin insisted that parents who are "fleeing the public schools" have more basic academic concerns than public school teaching about evolution and sex, he characterized the fundamentalists as social separatists and described the people who are starting Christian schools as "Amish" in secular clothing. "They are that separated."

Philosophical Differences between Fundamentalist Educators and Public School Educators

Both Hazard and Baldwin referred to a recent Phi Delta Kappan article which comes to the missionary heart of the matter:

> The fundamentalist educators perceive a fundamental philosophical difference between themselves and leaders of public education. Like 17th century Puritans they believe in the innate depravity of man. Because they believe that the corrupt nature of humans can be changed only through a supernatural infusion of divine grace, religious conversion becomes the basis of all education. Furthermore, since human nature is utterly depraved, children require strict supervision and authoritarian guidance if they are not to be overcome by the evil of Satan and their own nature.

Fundamentalists see public education by contrast as proceeding on John Dewey's conviction that the human being is basically good; that students will naturally seek the highest and best if left to themselves and that the adversary therefore is not Satan or an evil nature but poverty, ignorance and prejudice.

Assurance of Quality

Baldwin's challenge to state controls was to find "a less restrictive way to assure quality." He asked, "Is there any statistical information that proves 180 days of schooling is better than 245, or 195? Is there any data that says a library must have 50,000 volumes? Is there any way of proving that every certified teacher provides a better education than the noncertified?" In his view certification "means nothing." In many school districts, he charged, a third of the certified teachers cannot pass a 10th grade competency exam. "Who can stand here and tell me that a dedicated gal with two years of college experience and, perhaps, concerned loving, cannot teach a three-, four- or five-year-old child?"

In a way, Nebraska Commissioner of Education Anne Campbell stood there and told him--in more mellow terms. "I reject the myth of flight," said she, and likened wholesale criticism to the remark of a golfer to his partner who had just holed-in-one: "Nice shot, but your form is all wrong." By and large, the commissioner finds, "parents are very well satisfied with their own school. It is that other school where all of those terrible things take place."

Demands on Public Schools

Commissioner Campbell acknowledged the sins of omission and commission as the schools have been asked to do what she thinks is too much. She quoted her California counterpart, Wilson Riles: "The schools are being asked to do what people used to ask God to do." Stressing diversity of the public school assignment, she said that "some arrangement must guarantee health standards, infant and child care and nutritious foods, safety and recreation, good athletes, Nobel scientists and, oh yes, reading, writing, arithmetic, economics, history, science, art and music . . ." To fulfill such diverse assignments, she went on, "Local school boards, state departments of education, legislators and governors often took the line of least resistance in response to perceived political climates."

Campbell added that "obviously our public schools cannot do it all, but when push comes to shove, parents of the large (social) community cannot reach a consensus and educators have difficulty as they wrestle with their specialties--and therefore necessities--in the school program." She conceded that prestigious educators have come up with as many ill-conceived as well-conceived ideas to improve learning. "The factors related to human chemistry still defy classification." As parents become a minority, she forecast, "what happens in the public school will be decided by external forces."

Lack of Societal Change

In that regard Campbell was concerned that at the time public schools moved to provide equal opportunities in education, "equal housing and job opportunities were noticeably absent and a concurrent societal change failed to materialize. A Balkanization is occurring around socio-economic, ethnic and religious lines which tends to negate the community concern and ultimately erode the notion of the general welfare of the nation." She sensed that both religious and social consciences have been tweaked "and the resulting turmoil has bred conflict." The commissioner stated:

> The current effort to exaggerate the so-called flight from the public school repeats in a cyclical way historical economic and security-related downturns. Inflation, book burnings, religious fervor, ethnic resurgence, violence and fear are reproduced and we should perhaps not be shocked by the repercussions that impact government and public institutions. Granted the sophistication of reactions to real and imagined events has heightened the anxiety--and the over-reaction on the part of legislators in many cases to do something now--one of those "do something nows" is to offer as a choice, at public expense, pluralistic and diverse systems of schooling at the elementary and secondary level in competition with an existing system.

Campbell's advice to legislators was:

> Stop diminishing the mountain and size up the mole-hill. . .Public schools are offering choices to parents. They are transmitting a common language with quarrels only as to how it should be accomplished--a national heritage, a common set of values, a knowledge that is appropriate for necessary political functioning with heterogeneous student population. Public schools are offering a choice, a diversity of experiences and exposures to differing viewpoints. As a majority of us grew up we were indoctrinated by our parents, by their values and religious beliefs. But as our parents differed and strayed from the indoctrination of their parents so have we and so will a majority of our children and their children who follow us. There will always be a tug of war between preservation and progress. There may be people who don't want things to get better. . .The reality is that there is a cleansing, painful to be sure, that will strengthen the universal system of education.

Examination of an "Utopian" Education

The Atlanta seminar took the form of a simulated public hearing before the education committee of the state that Senator Katz called "Utopia" and he offered committee members a chance to question the "witnesses." New York's persuasive assemblyman, Leonard Stavisky, was curious how legislators, brooking no state interference with professing and practicing one's faith, could assure in the

burgeoning nonpublic academies "regular attendance, adequate hours of instruction, the quality of classroom and laboratory experience, the adequacy of the school library and the professional criteria of teachers who are certified."

Professor Hazard suggested the answer lies in a mixture of philosophy, traditional notions of parental love, care and custody, and the legal role of the state. He reminded participants that education was once all nonpublic. The public system is the interloper, he said. Public control came in, grew strong and now is "ungrowing a bit." In that change parental control is more and more an unsettled matter. While, he added, "there is nothing sacred about parents' responsibility to educate their children . . . I can't believe that many parents are evilly intended when they send their kids to a nonpublic school. I can certainly quarrel with some of their choices (that are) not always for the best interests of the child, but for the preference of the parent. If it comes down to a phoney education preference which masks my own stupidity, my own parental biases that I want inculcated in my children, I'm not so sure that the public at large should stand still and let me do that . . . Heavens yes, we need state regulation (but) we need to fire with rifles rather than artillery . . ."

Urban Education

Peppery Bob Davis of the Tennessee House, who is "not sure busing has worked," ventured that urban education is the "number one domestic problem." He questioned whether we "solve it with money" or with a different approach, including a different method for assigning principals and teachers. Too many of them, in his experience, want to flee to the suburban schools. In response, Campbell pointed out that zero-based taxing and budgeting strategies in many states mean de facto reallocation of money, and she spoke approvingly of Nebraska's weighting of "disadvantagement" in arriving at formulas for urban school funding. She questioned whether federal Title I money might not have been more usefully applied to getting the normal classroom enrollment for the disadvantaged down to a 15-1 pupil-teacher ratio, "rather than pulling youngsters out of the classroom" for remedial instruction.

Nonparental Control

When dairyman Jim Cooper, chairman of the Arizona House committee on education, asked why parents could not be more involved in what Senator Katz called a "commitment for partnership" in their child's education, Baldwin answered that parents are prevented by a "concentration of the education process away from the parents" through control by city, state and federal governments. "Some superintendents," he charged, "feel they know what is best for children no matter what parents think." Local boards, he added, must contend with teacher association demands and state "dictatorial powers."

Parental Prerogative

Cooper's questions about more shared time for religious instruction brought an observation from Hazard that he was not aware of any legal problems about released time or dual registration. But they have not grown and he speculates it might be parental indifference or public educators' resistance. However, he scorned "an overwhelming tendency to overstate dictatorial powers of the state" and called it a "red herring, a straw person." Hazard emphasized, "If I want to exercise my parental prerogative to keep my child home and educate him in my notion of what I want the world to be, I have every right, if I wish, I suppose, to raise my child as a red-neck, a little Nazi or as a deeply committed humanist. I think we are unnecessarily flapping around accusing the state of all kinds of sins it hasn't committed." Parents, he supposed, "will try everything and come back to the public schools." He added in response to another question that there has been no conclusive research whether unionization, which was supposed to improve public education, has done just that. He concluded that strikes and other union concerns "can't help but detract from a teacher's time on task." Time on task is often a determinant variable in a teacher's effectiveness.

Double Standard of Discipline in Public and Private Schools

Since school discipline had come up many times during the seminar, Nebraska ECS Commissioner Ross Rasmussen raised a question why "we have a double set of laws for discipline in the public and nonpublic schools." Public school staff people often complain their hands are tied by growing civil rights legislation. But Campbell's rebuttal was that in 95 percent of the cases "discipline can be taken care of in the public schools" by teachers who have expectations of good student conduct and who know how to organize and know what they are teaching. The idea of a double standard "may be a myth" she said and Baldwin concurred. But Campbell insisted that "in many cases when a student gets out of bounds in a nonpublic school he will show up the next day in public school."

Clustering

Rafael R. Garcia, administrative aide for cultural affairs to the governor of Puerto Rico, volunteered that Campbell's "Balkanization" remarks had worried him. They "tend to negate the positiveness of the American cultural variance" that he thinks we can and should accept, the working together while having mutual respect. Spanish, in his view for instance, has become the second American language. Campbell replied that she would like all children to know two languages, but she cited early American ethnic clustering as a "barrier" to national progress. A common language for the general welfare is an important factor in schooling, she feels, and it is the duty of the home, rather than the school, to preserve the native language.

Need for an Open Mind

Finally, to return to Hazard's low-key observations of enrollment trends, his "so what?" message about nonpublic competition with the public schools commended to legislators an open mind. He mused:

> It seems hardly likely that these (nonpublic) enrollments will pose any serious threat to the vitality of the public school system. . . I don't think the world is ending because parents are choosing some rather different approaches to educating their kids. One can find evidence that parent alienation from local public schools is not altogether arbitrary and capricious. There are some aspects of public school management in operation that encourage pupils and parents to look to alternative means. For whatever reasons, the climate in many public schools is not conducive to personal growth in learning for a great number of pupils. In too many school districts, particularly in urban centers, our schools are little more than academic slums and our best efforts to educate children are frustrated by massive indifference and inertia. . . The expansion (in nonpublic enrollments), taken in perspective, likely is far healthier for us than the national movement toward monolithic school organizations and deadly uniformity in school curriculum and schooling procedures . . . It seems clear to me that our public schools cannot, and probably should not, try to stem whatever tide is pulling our children out and into the nonpublic schools. It may well be that our public schools will serve a much smaller clientele (both in scope of mission and in numbers) than in the recent past.
>
> Deliberately or by default, the scope and sweep of public education will contract to more nearly conform to its productive capacities. If the nonpublic schools, including the Christian academies, can serve heretofore unserved educational needs, our best response may be to encourage, promote and facilitate their efforts.

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